

An expanding population with unmet needs: a survey of people who use peptides, anabolic steroids, or other performance and image enhancing drugs in the context of needle and syringe programs

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Introduction:

Use of performance- and image-enhancing drugs (PIEDs) is commonly reported among people accessing Needle and Syringe Programs (NSPs); however, gaps remain in understanding their characteristics and needs.

Methods:

An online survey of people who use PIEDs was launched at Kirketon Road Centre's (KRC) NSP and Sydney Sexual Health Centre on 1 March 2026. Descriptive analyses were conducted on 95 complete responses collected to 30 April 2026, and findings were compared with a similar KRC survey from 2014.

Results:

Compared to 2014, when all participants were male, the 2026 sample included women (21%) and non-binary participants (3%). In the past three months, 51% reported using peptides only, while 42% used anabolic steroids (75% of whom also used peptides); 36% initiated use within the past six months.

NSPs were the primary source of injecting equipment for 76%, though 58% attended monthly or less, and some reported difficulties accessing equipment via pharmacies or online. Most (64%) reported improved injecting practices due to NSP engagement.

While experiences of PIED use were generally positive, 31% reported continuing use despite unwanted effects. Nearly half (47%) had never had a health appointment related to PIED use, while 49% had accessed HIV and hepatitis C testing. Risk behaviours included being injected by others (43%), injecting others (30%), and sharing vials (9%); no needle sharing was reported. Additionally, 22% had more than five sexual partners in the past 12 months.

Discussion and Conclusions:

People who use PIEDs and access NSPs represent a diverse and growing group with evolving health needs.

Implications:

There is limited clarity regarding the role of NSPs in supplying injecting equipment and delivering services for this population.

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